

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20

USIA-15 SAM-01 ACDA-19 IO-14 AID-20 IGA-02 DRC-01

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R 061140Z FEB 74

FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7581

INFO AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

AMEMBASSY SAIGON

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENTIANE 0987

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, MARR, AU, LA

SUBJECT: PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM'S WHISTLE-STOP VISIT
TO LAOS

SUMMARY: WHITLAM VISIT WAS TIMELY PAT ON THE BACK FOR SOUVANNA
AND POINTED UP FOREIGN SUPPORT FOR LAO SETTLEMENT. SOME
NEW AUSTRALIAN AID MAY BE FORTHCOMING FOR VIETIANE WATER-
WORKS AND WHITLAM PROMISED TO CONSIDER AUSTRALIAN PARTI-
CIPATION IN NAM NGUM PROJECT. VISIT WAS SLIGHTLY MARRED
BY POINTLESS MEETING WITH JUNIOR PATHET LAO FIGURE SOTH
PHETRASY. SOUVANNA WAS QUITE PLEASED WITH VISIT AND
EXTREMELY OPTIMISTIC ABOUT PROSPECTS FOR FORMING, OR
AT LEAST NAMING, NEW GOVERNMENT BY FEBRUARY 21. END
SUMMARY

1. AUSTRALIAN PRIME MINISTER AND MRS. GOUGH WHITLAM
VISITED LAOS FOR FIVE HOURS FEBRUARY 4, MEETING WITH
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PRIME MINISTER SOUVANNA PHOUMA AND PATHET LAO DELE-

GATION CHIEF SOTH PHETRASY, AND ATTENDING PRIME MINISTER'S DINNER IN THEIR HONOR.

2. DURING THE TALKS WITH SOUVANNA, WHITLAM EMPHASIZED AUSTRALIAN SUPPORT FOR NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT AND CRITICIZED "FOREIGN INTERVENTION" - INCLUDING AMERICAN MILITARY AID IN THIS DEFINITION- IN INDOCHINA. HE TOLD SOUVANNA THAT LAOS WAS THE ONLY INDOCHINA COUNTRY HE COULD VISIT, BECAUSE ONLY HERE WAS A SETTLEMENT WORKING. SOUVANNA DISCUSSED HIS HOPES TO SEE NEW COALITION GOVERNMENT FORMED BY FEBRUARY 21 AND ASKED FOR NEW AID FROM AUSTRALIA TO HELP LAOS BEGIN RECONSTRUCTION. HE SPECIFICALLY ASKED FOR AUSTRALIAN ASSISTANCE TO VIENTIANE WATERWORKS AND NAM NGUM DAM. AUSTRALIAN EMBOFF INFORMED US THAT ALTHOUGH AMBASSADOR BORTHWICH IS NOT IN FAVOR OF SUCH AID, WITLAM REACTED POSITIVELY TO SOUVANNA'S APPROACH.

3. THE TWO PRIME MINISTERS ALSO DISCUSSED CONCLUSION OF LAO/AUSTRALIAN TRADE AGREEMENT, THE FIRST DRAFT OF WHICH WAS PRESENTED TO THE AUSTRALIANS BY THE LAO FOUR WEEKS AGO. THE AUSTRALIANS WILL PRESENT A COUNTER-DRAFT SHORTLY. AUSTRALIA WILL APPARENTLY OFFER TARIFF PREFERENCES TO LAO EXPORTS AS PART OF THIS AGREEMENT. WHAT THESE EXPORTS COULD BE REMAINS TO BE SEEN.

4. WHITLAM'S MEETING WITH SOTH PHETRASY WAS A MEANINGLESS EXERCISE. AUSTRALIANS HAD BEEN PRESSING IRRATIONALLY TO HAVE PATHET LAO CHIRMAN SOUPHANOUVONG COME TO VIENTIANE TO MEET WHITLAM. PATHET LAO FIRST SUGGESTED SENIOR FIGURE PHOUN SIPRASEUTH INSTEAD, BUT IN THE END IT WAS THE POWERLESS PARTY LINE PARROT SOTH PEHTRASY WHO PURVEYED THE USUAL ANTI-IMPERIALIST SOLGANS TO WHITLAM. SOTH DID TELL WHITLAM THAT HE HAD JUST RECEIVED A NEW TWELVE POINT PROGRAM EMBODYING PATHET LAO POSITIONS ON VARIOUS FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC POLICY ISSUES WHICH THEIR MINISTERS WILL INTRODUCE IN CABINET UPON FORMATION OF NEW GOVERNMENT. WHITLAM STRESSED IMPORTANCE OF NORTH VIETNAMESE WITHDRAWAL FROM LAOS AND SOTH COUNTERED WITH STATEMENT THAT "THREE STATES OF INDOCHINA SHOULD BE LEFT ALONE TO HANDLE THEIR OWN AFFAIRS." THERE WAS NO DISCUSSION OF AUSTRALIAN

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ASSISTANCE TO PATHET LAO-CLAIMED AREAS.

5. COMMENT: WHITLAM VISIT CAME AT FORTUITOUS TIME, SINCE IT EMPHASIZED FOREIGN APPROVAL FOR LAO SETTLEMENT AND SUPPORT FOR SOUVANNA AS INDISPENSABLE FACTOR IN LAO EQUATION. IT WAS SOMEWHAT MARRED BY POINTLESS MEETING WITH PATHET LAO FIGURE BUT WE DO NOT BELIEVE SOUVANNA OBJECTED TO THIS ASPECT OF VISIT.

WHITEHOUSE

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